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ABSTRACT

Teaching and learning processes are complex acts that take place within a complex social institution--the school. Three categories of influences on the teaching/learning process in public schools are presented: external organizations, external social forces, and internal forces in the schools. The external forces considered are: the Supreme Court and its decisions affecting education; federal and state agency regulations, policies, and funding; and teacher organizations and collective bargaining. The examples of external social forces are: drugs and alcohol usage; parental influence; the Back to Basics movement; and Proposition 13. In examining the internal forces on teaching, the interactions between principals, teachers, pupils, and organizational development are traced. For each category, research questions are suggested for further study. The conclusion states that until researchers, practitioners, and theorists identify and agree upon specific and precisely defined variables and the functional relationships that exist among them, little progress can be made in assessing the pervasive influence of social forces on education. (FG)

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THE INFLUENCE OF SELECTED CONTEXT VARIABLES ON SCHOOLING

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Introduction

A multitude of forces operating in our society today - social, political, economic - are presumed to have significant impact on the teaching/learning process in elementary and secondary schools and thus have implications for teacher training, pre-service and in-service. When one considers the rapid pace of technological advancements that have occurred during the last twenty-five years and the impact, for better or worse, on our society and its educational institutions, it is awesome.

Changes in technology and social policy have often resulted in changes in values held by individuals and groups in our society; no institution - home, school, university, church, government, business, industry - has escaped the force of change in the last quarter century. So numerous are the forces within our society that influence, potentially or actually, the teaching and learning process, they almost defy classification according to Charters.[1] Among the forces are: the onset of Civil Rights; the breakdown of family life; the erosion of moral values; the impact of mass media; the recessions and the decline of the dollar; the protest movement over Southeast Asian policy; the emergence of teacher strikes and collective bargaining for teachers; the increased use of drugs and alcohol by youth and adults; the emergence of the youth culture; the decline of respect for authority; the distain for public officials; the drama of Watergate.

The above represent but a few of the forces at work in our society that influence, directly or indirectly, the process of schooling. Obviously, only a few of these forces can be examined in this paper as they relate to the potential impact on schools and the educational process. The number of potential research studies that could be generated from the study of these forces or the interaction among the forces is almost unlimited.

For the purpose of this paper, the author asserts that teaching and learning processes are complex acts that take place within a complex social institution - the school. It is held, further, that instructors and learners are influenced in some manner, directly or indirectly, by forces present within their local, state and national environments. However, the manner in which these forces influence the school system and teachers or teacher educators is largely unknown. Thus, to formulate research efforts that will succeed in identifying the linkages that do exist among the contextual forces, teacher behavior and student learning outcomes will be a difficult task.

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For the purposes of this paper, three categories of influence on the teaching/learning process will be presented. External organizational influence will focus on the impact that the courts, state and federal agencies and teacher associations have on the educational process. Four contemporary social forces will then be reviewed for their potential impact on schooling: drugs and alcohol usage; parental influence; the Back to the Basics Movement; Proposition 13 Fever. Finally, within school influences of pupils, teachers, principals and organizational development will be reviewed with respect to their influence on the school as a social system. The primary focus of this review will center on the public schools. Inferences and questions regarding potential research studies for teacher education will be presented at the end of each of the three major sections.

CATEGORY I. THE INFLUENCE OF SELECTED EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of the United States has been one of the most significant forces influencing education in the past twenty-five years. The decisions of the Warren Court, in particular, deserve attention. The Warren Court has been characterized by VanGeel[2] as an activist court; he traced the influence of this court with specific reference to the issues of equality of educational opportunity, students' rights, and religion. An activist justice, in VanGeel's terms, tends to view himself and the courts as a vigorous force to improve society and to insure that political and administrative actions are not unprincipled. Needless to say, the Warren Court was active in the pursuit of social justice. The current Burger Court, on the other hand, is perceived as "less active" with regard to all school issues. The tendency of the "less active justice" is to take the stance of a strict constructionist with regard to the constitution; this type of justice is concerned with the potential for chaos or conflict that could emanate from the Court's unyielding insistence on principle.

Among the noteworthy decisions of the U. S. Supreme Court identified by Nystrand and Staub[3] are: Brown vs. Board of Education that did away with the separate but equal concept of segregated education and ushered in the era of desegregation of the schools; Tinker vs. DesMoines Independent School District which established that schools do not have absolute rights over students; San Antonio Independent School District vs. Rodriquez stated that the solution to unequal educational opportunity caused by unequal ability to pay taxes is the responsibility of lawmakers and not the courts; Goss vs. Lopez found education to be a property right of students that must be protected by due process procedures.

The history and continuing efforts at desegregation of schools resulting from the Brown decision still have an unfinished agenda, particularly in the cities of the North. School effectiveness studies and Coleman's[4] controversial study need to be replicated.

The Tinker decision gave birth to the "students' rights movement" that has significantly alterted the traditional sources of power and authority in the schools. Mawdsley[5] also believes that Tinker has also had a diminishing effect on parental control and student home life as well as school life. The short-term and long-range effects of Tinker should be evaluated as they relate to the need for the training of teachers, both pre-service and in-service.

The Mora decision of the Supreme Court further extended the rights of students with respect to unauthorized search by holding that evidence of probable cause must exist for a student or a student's locker to be searched. This has also had serious effects on the traditional modes of student control in schools.

The influence of Brown and Tinker on community life as well as on schools, pupils, teachers and administrators has been enormous. The social and educational changes brought about by these two decisions are worthy of significant inquiry with regard to both broad and specific effects upon schools and the teaching/learning process.

Federal and State Education Agencies

The enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 signaled the aggressive entry of the federal government into education as an activist agency. Further enactments of Congress have resulted in the initiation of myriads of programs that sought to strengthen education at all levels. In the 1960's, for the first time in our educational history, the Congress and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare became forces to be acknowledged because of the investment of billions of dollars in the schools. No school system in the country was left untouched by this federal intervention. However, with funding from these agencies come policies, directives and sanctions that curtailed much of the freedom previously enjoyed by local school districts. The impact of federal government intervention needs to be fully evaluated with respect to the broad effects if has had on education at all levels.

In recent decades, State Education Agencies (SEA) have also become influential with respect to the improvement of education. This can be traced to federal government funding that allowed SEA's to expand and upgrade staffing; thus many state agencies that were considered to be weak and passive have become more powerful and highly

active in monitoring the educational process at the local district level. SEAs have also become active in seeking the passage of legislation to implement policies; the promulgation of regulations that both govern and restrict certain aspects of schooling have become increasingly oppressive in recent years. Failure to comply with state or federal regulations places a school system or a higher education institution in jeopardy of loss of all federal funds. Therefore, the force of the impact of the activism of state and federal agencies has influenced the lives of teachers and educational institutions in significant ways that need to be fully explored.

Teacher Organizations and Collective Bargaining

National, state and local teacher associations have become a force to be reckoned with during the 60's and 70's. The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and state and local agencies have been aggressively militant in their pursuit of equitable wages and working conditions for teachers. Teacher strikes, while decreasing in recent years, have created turmoil in communities throughout the country. The inherent management-labor conflict that exists in industrial unionism is present in the relationships among teachers, administrators and school boards. Teacher militancy has pitted teachers against principals, thus completely changing the traditional cooperative relationship that had existed in American education until the mid 60's. The posture taken by NEA indicates that teachers will continue to be more militant and aggressive in asserting their rights to participation in the policymaking areas of education at the national, state and local level.

Whether or not the lack of trust between teachers and administrators promulgated by teacher union officials can be replaced by mutual problemsolving for the improvement of education remains to be seen. Christie[6] believes that the most positive change resulting from teacher militancy has been a forced change of the paternalistic attitude held by administrators toward teachers. If paternalism can be replaced by shared decision-making, perhaps teacher militancy and administrative response can be channeled into constructive action. The impact of teacher militancy on the teaching/learning process and the organizational capabilities of the school needs to be studied. Further, the involvement of parents' and citzens' groups in the collective bargaining process should be explored.

CATEGORY I. SOME RESEARCHABLE QUESTIONS:

What are the effects of the Brown Decision, 25 years later, regarding actual desegregation of the schools in the South? The North? How and in what ways has desegregation affected career patterns of youth who experienced desegregated schooling? What has been the effect of desegregation on minority and majority community life and educational aspirations?

Has the proposed increase in minority student achievement and in self-esteem been realized as a result of school desegregation? What inferences can be drawn from the desegregation effort regarding the selection and training of teachers?

In what specific ways has the students' rights movement altered the distribution of power and the teachers' role in secondary schools? What effect has the students' rights movement had on students' sense of control over their environment? Is there a relationship between students' rights and increased student self-esteem? What is the relationship between the students' rights movement and the decline of respect for authority in the schools? In the culture? What classroom management skills do secondary teachers need to cope effectively with disruptive students?

What are the demonstrable effects of Federal programs in the schools? What perceptible benefits to teachers are observable/measurable from federal program intervention; what are the results of cost-benefit analyses of federal programs? In what observable/measurable ways have federal government program improvement produced specific benefits to learners? teachers? teacher educators? How has PL 94-142, requiring mainstreaming of special needs students, affected teachers' attitudes and classroom behavior? How can teachers be prepared to assimilate special needs students in regular classrooms?

Has collective bargaining actually influenced the classroom instructional behavior of teachers? In what specific ways has "life in classrooms" been influenced by collective bargaining? What personal-social-professional characteristics influence teachers to take teacher union leadership positions at local, state and federal levels? What are the lasting effects of teacher strikes on schools and communities? In that ways has teacher militancy altered the following: the public's perception of teachers? The students' perception of teachers? Teachers' self-perception? Administrative and School Boards' perceptions of teachers?

CATEGORY II. THE INFLUENCE OF SELECTED EXTERNAL SOCIAL FORCES ON SCHOOLING

Many other social and cultural forces operating within the broader society have impacted on the schools in ways that directly affect the lives of students and teachers. In the brief overview that follows, it is impossible to do justice to any one issue. The following sources of influence are judged to be among the most significant and will be reviewed: drugs and alcohol usage, parental influence, Back to the Basics, and Proposition 13 Fever.

Drug and Alcohol Usage

The increase of drug and alcohol usage by youth in our culture has reached alarming proportions. All levels of education from the elementary school through the university have been affected. Drug and alcohol use by students also embraces all socio-economic classes in our society.

It is difficult to ascertain the prime causes of increased usage of drugs and alcohol; however, they are present in and around the school environment on a daily basis. Most junior and senior high school teachers and administrators deal with problems of drug infiltration, drug use, and drug overdose on a daily basis. The turbulence or the passivity that is caused by student use of drugs as it relates to the teaching/learning process is in need of study.

Parental Influence

A significant amount of research exists relative to the influence of socio-economic status on the achievement motivation of students. In a review of research, Spady[7] cites that the value climate of parents who esteem academic achievement have a positive impact upon the dominant character of the peer group value system. It is also likely that student peer groups create conditions whithin the school environment that affect the teachers' ability to use or not use his/her own skills and normative resources effectively. Spady[8] points to consistent evidence in most studies reviewed that the achievement levels of both black and white students is maximized when the average classroom contains a large portion of middle-class whites.

The rise of divorce in the American culture and its effects upon children with respect to their schooling is in need of study. With an increasing lack of stability in family life, Tye and Novotney[9] suggest that teachers may be required to spend more time in the future providing a counseling function to students with a corresponding decrease in the amount of time allocated to the teaching function. We need to examine the implications of the change in family life for teacher education.

The emerging role of women in the working world is also likely to affect family life when compared to the role of women in past generations. The emergence of both male and female single parent families is another phenomena that needs to be examined in terms of the impact it may have on children and consequently on the teaching/learning/counseling process.

Back to the Basics Movement

Following the expansionist decade of the 60's in education where a multitude of innovations were introduced in the schools, due in large part to federal government funding, the 70's have witnessed a strong conservative trend. Perhaps the most identifiable recent issue related to this movement is the issue of competency testing for high school graduation. The interesting thing about this movement, as Pipho[10] notes, is that it was started by the "man on the street". In three short years, the movement has resulted in over thirty state legislatures enacting competency testing laws. These actions reflect the society's concern and declining SAT and achievement scores and the broad problem of functional illiteracy of many high school graduates.

The competency testing movement is a direct communication to educators from the public that it is unhappy with the current state of learning in the schools. The regulation that will follow competency legislation to enforce and monitor competency laws will have direct effect on the process of schooling and the responsibilities of teachers and administrators to insure that students are capable of demonstrating mastery of basic skills of communication and computation before graduating from high school.

Proposition 13 Fever

Since the passage of the Jarvis-Gann initiative in California in early 1978, the "tax revolt" movement has spread like a brush fire across the nation. Fanned by angry home owners whose property taxes pay for a substantial portion of local education, proposed cutbacks or limitations on local spending will probably emerge from state legislatures; this movement is likely to have serious consequences for education. Just how and in what ways the movement will affect the teaching/learning process is unknown at the moment. However, where the public has the opportunity to directly influence educational spending through bond issues or tax referenda, there is sufficient evidence to believe that education will be seriously affected. We are in for difficult days ahead unless local, state and federal governments find more equitable ways to finance education with specific avoidance of the past reliance on the property tax as the prime source of revenue at the local school district level.

Embedded in the Proposition 13 movement is an underlying lack of confidence in public education. Lack of discipline in the schools, increased vandalism of school property, teacher assaults, grade inflation, lowering of standards and lowered achievement scores in general have been cited by parents and critics as evidence that the schools are not doing the job.

CATEGORY II. SOME RESEARCHABLE QUESTIONS:

In what ways has the increased use of drugs and alcohol influenced the life goals and aspirations of youth? In what ways has student use of drugs and alcohol affected teacher classroom behavior? What implications does this have for pre-service and in-service training of teachers? What relationships, if any, exist among the following: increased drug usage; increase in youth crime and vandalism; increase in venereal disease among youth? What relationships exist among the aforementioned problems and student disruptive behavior in schools? What information and skills do teachers need to cope with student disruptive behavior? What are the implications of student disruptive behavior for teacher preparation and selection?

What is the relationship between decrease in family stability and increase in student disruptive behavior and vandalism in schools? What knowledge and skills do teachers need in order to deal with student behavior resulting from unstable family life? What personal characteristics in prospective teachers are required to relate to student needs for more personal relationships at the secondary level? What type of in-service training is required to enable teachers to relate effectively to students from unstable family backgrounds?

What are the attitudes of teachers toward the "Back to the Basics Movement"? What knowledge and skills must be acquired by secondary teachers to implement competency testing and basic skills improvement programs? How and in what ways will the competency testing movement affect curriculum and instructional emphases in the schools? What positive and negative effects is the basic skills and competency testing movement likely to have on teachers? What characteristic of teachers are associated with effective basic skills instruction?

How will school programs and instructional practices be affected by tax limitation initiatives? How will state and federal mandated instructional programs be influenced by spending limitations imposed by local and state elected officials?

How and in what ways will teachers reconcile parents' demands for stress on academics and discipline and student needs for empathetic understanding and personal counseling?

CATEGORY III. THE INFLUENCE OF SELECTED INTERNAL FORCES ON TEACHING IN THE SCHOOLS

Within the school environment itself, the interactions among pupils, teachers administrators and support personnel have a direct impact on the teaching/learning process. The size of the school, its organizational arrangements, the socio-economic level of students; the ethnic and religious background of students, the rural, suburban or urban character of the school all interact significantly, according to Lortie[11] to influence the teaching/learning process in ways that are not always predictable or fully understood.

In this review, the following internal influences will be examined: pupils, teachers, principals, and organizational development.

Pupil Influence

Pupils influence the teaching/learning process by the disposition, the motivation and the prior knowledge and skills they bring to the classroom. In turn, pupils are influenced by the peer culture, the climate of the school and the classroom, and the manner in which they are treated by adults in the learning environment.

Much has been written about the alienation of today's youth in general and their hostility toward the authority figures in the school. Spady[12] contends that the custodial-control function of the school is the chief source of strain and potential conflict; other sources of tension include the selection process used to track students into different levels of ability and the certification function that ultimately results in the award of a high school diploma. Alienation may also stem from the traditional ways in which schools operate. Much of the reward system in today's secondary school favors the high achieving, highly motivated student who is also active in the extra-curricula affairs of the school. Students who are unwilling or unable to achieve satisfaction through these means tend to withdraw into alienated subcultures.

The alienated youth in secondary schools tend to be the most rebellious, tend to engage in more acts of vandalism and assault teachers. Too often these youth find solace only in the company of their frustrated peers; there is a tendency on their part to seek escape through the use of drugs and alcohol or the psychological or physical withdrawal from school.

Green[13] states that for lower class whites, blacks, Chicanos and other minorities education has not become the great equalizer that it has for other groups in our culture. What often emerges among these youth is that school becomes a place where they can find a sense of identity with others of their age and status cohort. A counter-culture tends to emerge that often reflects a hedonistic preoccupation with self-satisfaction and the creation of a small scale alternative life style that further removes these youth from the mainstream of school and society.

Among middle and upper middle class youth, another phenomena occurs as described by Spady and Adler.[14] These authors point out that overly permissive childrearing practices and lack of stability in home life often result in the lack of development of inner resources in students that are necessary to survive effectively in an academic culture. Lack of the inner resources of competitiveness, willingness to delay gratification, willingness to work to comply with the strict demands and the expectations placed upon them by others, handicap these youth in their ability to cope with the school environment.

The behavior described above is well known to secondary teachers in today's schools. They need advice and techniques that will allow them to cope more effectively with students that they try to teach.

Teacher Influence

It is generally concluded that most teachers in our culture come from the middle ranges of the socio-economic strata in our society. Often cited are the clash in values between middle class teachers and students who come from lower socio-economic classes. The expectations that middle class teachers have for the behavior, language use, attention to learning, and the sanctions and rewards used often differ radically from those values held by students. Often, teachers are not equipped with the understanding of student subcultures and their values nor are they equipped to deal with the overt rejection of their authority by students.

Spady[15] contends that teachers must first find ways to establish rapport with students by projecting a concern for them as individuals; he advises teachers to develop a sense of security and confidence in pupils before attempting to impose or legitemize control mechanisms or achievement expectations. The key variable that appears to influence potential student achievement, according to Spady, is the ability to project empathy and concern; this is likely to promote the conditions for voluntary compliance by students and increase the likelihood of learning. However, perceived empathy must be combined with a role model of teaching excellence in order to achieve maximum results. In a similar vein, Green[16] notes that the development of a positive self-concept in black students is the key variable in increasing the likelihood of academic achievement of black students.

Dreeban[17] cautions us to remember the fact that teaching, by and large, is a self-directed and isolated process. With all the uncertainties in unpredictabilities that are inherent in the culture and its students, the teacher is likely to be more of a reactive agent than a proactive agent in managing the learning process. This means that a teacher must be able to respond quickly to the constantly changing events in the classroom.

Influence of Principals

There is no question in the mind of the author that the key variable that differentiates among effective, marginal and ineffective schools is the role model of the principal and the positive perception of that role by the faculty. A series of studies conducted by Williams[18] et. al. confirm this finding.

Critical to the effective functioning of the school is a caring and supportive posture projected by the principal for his/her faculty To the extent that the faculty perceive this, they tend to be mutually supportive and capable of working together effectively to achieve both personal and institutional goals. The principal

who places institutional goals above personal concerns for faculty achieves less productivity from his/her faculty and is perceived less favorably.

Leadership ability is critical to the effectiveness of the principal. The successful principal knows when to intervene aggressively with faculty and when to withdraw; he/she knows how to organize productive meetings, how to share decision-making and how to provide feedback to staff. The powerful principal, described by Liberman[19] uses a mixed set of strategies depending upon the condition encountered within the school at a given time. A judicious use of strategies combined with an expressed concern for each faculty member tends to make the school a dynamic place for faculty and students.

Students similarly respond to a principal's leadership. They respect and respond to a caring approach that is combined with a fair and consistent application of an explicit set of behaviorial expectation for all students.

Organizational Development

In the past ten years there has been an attempt to apply principles of social psychology used effectively in industrial settings to improve the organizational effectiveness of schools. Schmuck, Runkel, Miles and Getzels, among others, have been active in research and development activities of this type. Organizational Development (OD) places a premium on the development of organizational health as manifested in problem-solving capabilities of a school faculty. The school, not individuals within it, is the unit of analysis and the object of the effort. OD specialists intervene with training programs, data feedback, confrontation, and process observations to provide faculty with the skills to become effective problem solvers. Among the competencies that they seek to develop in faculties are the following: increasing communication effectiveness; improving goal setting; uncovering and working with conflict; improving group procedures; making decisions. The goals of Organizational Renewal (OR) for schools are similar to the goals of OD.

The research findings of Schmuck and Runkel[20], and Schmuck and Miles[21], and Williams[22] et. al. indicate that OD and OR techniques do create in school faculties the ability to adapt to change and engage effectively in school improvement activities.

The general shortcoming of OD and OR research to date is the inability to relate faculty effectiveness to increased student learning on a broad scale. The researchers cited above acknowledge that the ultimate criterion for success must be direct benefits to students. This remains to be demonstrated.

CATEGORY III. SOME RESEARCHABLE QUESTIONS:

What teacher characteristics interact positively with empathetic approaches to students from different socio-economic levels? What predictor variables are most highly associated with effective teaching behaviors with secondary school alienated youth? How can these predictor variables be used in screening teachers for training and placement? What classroom instructional/counseling techniques are positively related to enhanced self-concepts in students from minority groups? How can pre-service and in-service training experiences be organized to assist teachers in providing effective personal interactive skills with alienated youth? What personal-social characteristics of teachers are required to interact effectively with students' lack of "inner resources"? What types of parent effectiveness training programs can be implemented in schools, colleges and adult education programs to enhance the development of "inner resources" in public school students? What types of teacher training experience, pre and in-service are likely to produce teachers who can communicate effectively with alienated youth? How can secondary teachers be trained and retrained to provide a balanced empathetic and academic role model for youth?

In what ways is expressed teacher job satisfaction related to effective teaching behavior? Can organizational development and organizational renewal strategies be directly related to student achievement outcomes?

In what specific ways is the effective principal role related to changes in teacher classroom behavior? What in-service teacher training experiences are likely to dispose teachers to participate effectively in organizational development activities in schools?

Conclusion

The problem of which social forces operating in the culture at large are most potent with respect to their influence on teachers, the teacher/learning process, student learning and teacher training is a speculative question at best and will likely remain so for some time. Until researchers, practitioners and theorists are able to identify and agree upon specific and precisely defined variables and identify the functional relationships that exist among them, little progress can be made in the attempt to assess the pervasive influences of social forces in education.

The lack of a comprehensive theory that would account for social force variables and their interactions in the school environment is a serious disadvantage. The general lack of appropriate research methodology, cited by Herriot and Muse[22], to determine school effects is another serious disadvantage.

One area of social influence that shows promise as a prototype for study is the issue of competency testing. Documentation as to the origin of this issue as a social force is recorded by the Education Commission of the States. The direct impact on teachers with respect to their responsibilities and teaching requirements is relatively straightforward with respect to basic communication and computation skills. The ultimate effect on student learning is also within the reach of test and measurement specialists. Thus, we may have in the study of competency testing a prototype study that could cast a light on the problems and the prospects of an attempt to trace the influence of a social force, through the teacher to teaching/learning process to the student.

January 5, 1979

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